

# YOSEMITE

## NATIONAL PARK

*"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."*

— John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1869

## PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 21

October 2001

*"You can be sure that all of us in Yosemite are caring for this special place that is truly representative of America's heritage, beliefs, and values."*

Dear Yosemite Friends,

NATIONAL PARKS SYMBOLIZE the very freedoms attacked on September 11. For this reason, those of us who work for the National Park Service recognize the importance of continuing to serve the American people in honor of our nation's rich heritage.

This issue of the *Planning Update* will highlight the ongoing work in Yosemite National Park, work that fulfills our charge of preserving and protecting America's treasures for future generations. One project that underscores this importance is the redesign of the Lower Yosemite Fall area, an action that was presented in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. The redesign will not only protect vital riparian areas and cultural sites, but will allow for a better experience for the millions of visitors who come to this area.



Another project we are moving forward with is the *Fire Management Plan* and its *Environmental Impact Statement*. Originally scheduled for a late summer release, the *Fire Management Plan* was delayed while Yosemite fire managers monitored a series of lightning-caused wildland fires here in the park. Staff is now finalizing alternatives and the plan will be available for you to review this winter.

As we move through these days of uncertainty, you can be sure that all of us in Yosemite are caring for this special place that is truly representative of America's heritage, beliefs, and values.

Sincerely,

David A. Mihalic  
Park Superintendent



NPS Photo

### Restoring Natural Processes

Prescribed fire is one way to improve forest health while reducing the accumulation of debris on the forest floor.

## Stay Involved

WHEN THE Draft Yosemite Fire Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement is released this winter, a 60-day public comment period will begin. Because of the technical nature of the plan, local public meetings will be scheduled to explain the alternatives and their effects. Please check the park's planning web site ([www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning)) for a schedule of public meetings. The draft will be available on the park's web site and in hard copy. To receive a copy, contact the park by mail, phone, fax, or email (see back page of this *Planning Update*). **Please note: If you have already requested a copy of the plan, you do not need to submit another request.**

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The Planning Update is an occasional publication of the National Park Service, Office of the Superintendent, Yosemite National Park, P. O. Box 577, Yosemite, CA 95389.

Kristina Rylands edited this issue with contributions from Randy Fong, Margie Steigerwald, Martha Lee, Michele Morseth, Bob Hansen, and The Yosemite Fund.

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# Fire Management Plan

*In the last Planning Update, the National Park Service detailed the progress of the Draft Yosemite Fire Management Plan and its Environmental Impact Statement. Since then, several members of the park staff working on the plan were called into service to manage or suppress wildland fires in Yosemite and throughout much of the west. Work on the plan is now back on track and a draft is expected to be released this winter.*

*A revision to the Fire Management Plan is needed in order to be consistent with the new National Fire Policy. The goals of the plan include restoring fire to ecosystems, reducing the potential for catastrophic fire, reducing the risk of fire near communities and buildings, and mitigating the effects of wildland fire on regional air quality. The safety of firefighters and the public is the number one priority.*

## SCOPING RESULTS

Scoping for the *Fire Management Plan* was held in April 2001. The park received 92 comment letters, faxes, and emails. These, along with comments from a 1999 scoping period for the *Fire Management Plan*, have been taken into account as the planning team develops alternatives. A few concerns that influenced the alternatives are summarized below.

- **Community Protection and Ecosystem Restoration** — Some comments stated that community protection should be paramount. Other comments expressed that resource protection and ecosystem restoration should be the number one priority.
- **Fire Management Activities** — Comments were received indicating that the National Park Service should consider the use of multiple techniques to reduce forest fuel accumulations. Some comments suggested that mechanical thinning might impair ecosystem health or scenic views.
- **Community Involvement** — Comments were received indicating that the National Park Service should allow community members and volunteers to thin forests to create defensible space and allow noncommercial salvage of wood.



Photo by Brian Grogan

### Dedicated Crews

Yosemite's fire crews manage both prescribed fires and wildland fires throughout the park.

# Lower Yosemite Fall Project

## Site-specific Planning Begins

Yosemite Falls—no single feature has contributed more to the wide acclaim of Yosemite National Park. The beauty and power of this waterfall are unrivaled in the United States, and its allure spans the globe. An American icon, Yosemite Falls has become a pilgrimage for millions.

But Yosemite Falls represents far more than a world-renowned natural wonder. In its mist are found the seeds that fostered the national park idea: appreciation, protection, and reverence, as opposed to exploitation of the natural and cultural elements of America's heritage. One day soon, a visit to Yosemite Falls may convey these messages to visitors far better than it does today, filling them with a greater sense of wonder and appreciation.

The *Yosemite Valley Plan* provides direction regarding overall changes to the Lower Yosemite Fall area that would improve the visitor experience and protect natural and cultural resources. This improvement project is being funded by philanthropic gifts and entrance fee money.

The National Park Service has begun site-specific planning. In examining the project as identified in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*, the National Park Service now recommends a different preferred location for a replacement restroom. This new location is slightly outside of the development area described in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*. As a result, an environmental assessment will be prepared to analyze potential impacts from the preferred restroom location—impacts that were not previously analyzed in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*.

A 30-day public scoping period was held this summer to solicit concerns about the proposed restroom relocation. During this process, site-specific studies (involving archeological testing and geophysical sampling) along with 258 public scoping letters raised several issues for park management. Many of the letters expressed concern that the restroom relocation should be described in the context of the entire Lower Yosemite Fall Project. The National Park Service has decided to include in the environmental assessment a description of the Lower Yosemite Fall Project and its environmental analysis (from the *Yosemite Valley Plan*), as well as options for restroom relocation, maintenance of historic views of Upper and Lower Yosemite Falls, and a possible picnic area.

The environmental assessment is scheduled for release in November and will be open for a 30-day public comment period. It will be available online at [www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning). To receive a copy of the document, contact the park by phone, fax, or email (as described on the back page of this *Planning Update*).



Photo by Brian Grogan

### Lower Yosemite Fall

The Yosemite Falls area will be restored to make this important site a reflection of the beauty that surrounds it.

## Latest Developments

### Emergency Repairs on the Tuolumne Sewer Pipeline

— An emergency repair project began in late September to replace part of the Tuolumne Meadows sewer pipeline. Earlier this year, park staff discovered that the Tuolumne River had greatly eroded its northern bank, exposing the 60-year-old sewer line for the area's wastewater treatment facility. If left unchecked, winter snow and ice or spring runoff could have caused the sewer pipeline to break, detrimentally affecting the environment of the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River and potentially contaminating the water supply for the City of San Francisco.

### Campground Refurnishing Project

— Through campground and entrance fees collected as part of the Fee Demonstration Program, nine campgrounds outside of Yosemite Valley were refurnished this summer. The 736 picnic tables and 434 fire rings, replaced by Youth Conservation Corps crews, will benefit 200,000 campers each year.

### Cook's Meadow Restoration

— Restoration work continues in Cook's Meadow in Yosemite Valley to restore the hydrologic processes necessary for a healthy meadow while showcasing sustainable design practices. This is a collaborative effort involving the National Park Service, The Yosemite Fund, and the National Parks Foundation. In late September, The Yosemite Fund and Chevron volunteers began salvaging plants and sod along the asphalt trail that crosses the meadow. Asphalt and the built-up berm underneath the trail were removed. In its place, a raised boardwalk is being constructed using recycled materials provided by Unilever (through a National Parks Foundation grant) and will be wheelchair accessible with viewing platforms and interpretive wayside exhibits.

### Happy Isles Gauging Station Bridge Removal

— Upon completion of a 30-day public comment period on the *Happy Isles Gauging Station Bridge Removal Project Environmental Assessment*, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was prepared. Final approval by the National Park Service Pacific West Regional Director will allow demolition of the bridge to begin this fall (the Gauging Station will remain intact). The Happy Isles Gauging Station Bridge was closed in July 1997 due to damage sustained during the January 1997 flood.

**Cascades Dam Removal Project** — An environmental assessment is being prepared and is scheduled for public review this winter. Developments on this project will be announced in future editions of the *Planning Update*.



All Yosemite planning documents are available online. Visit:

**[www.nps.gov/yose/planning](http://www.nps.gov/yose/planning)**

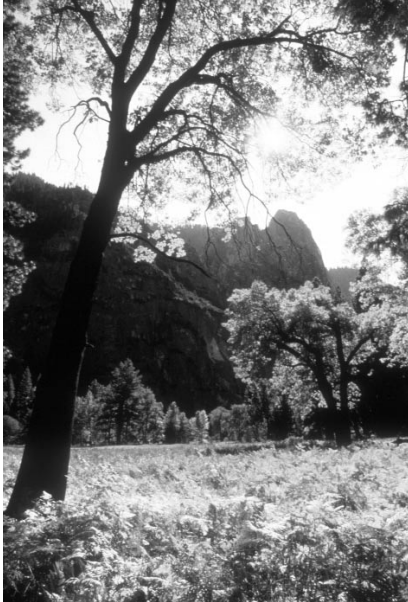


Photo by Mike Floyd

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- ☐ Send me the *Lower Yosemite Fall Project Environmental Assessment\**

\* Note: If you have already requested a copy of a draft document, you do not need to return this form.



- **Email your request to:** [yose\\_planning@nps.gov](mailto:yose_planning@nps.gov)
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